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SUPERNATURAL REVELATION *the*  
ONLY SURE HOPE *of* SINNERS.

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A  
S E R M O N

Preached in the  
High Church of *Edinburgh*, *Monday*  
*January 12. 1741.*

Upon Occasion of the Anniversary Meeting  
of the Society in *Scotland* for *propagating*  
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

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By Mr. *Webster*, one of the Ministers of the City.

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## Advertisement.

*THE following Discourse is taken from the Author's Notes, and contains several Illustrations of the Argument, not delivered from the Pulpit.---He has attempted to answer the Objections against the Christian Institution, drawn from the imperfect Promulgation of the Gospel, in a Consistency with the Doctrines of Free Grace and Particular Election; how far he has succeeded, the Reader must judge; and, tho' he may have failed; he is perswaded the Argument is good in itself, and that we are not yet reduced to this Dilemma, either to give up with Calvinism, or embrace Deism; ---on the contrary, he is extremely apprehensive, that the Conduct of certain Writers, in having departed from some of the peculiar Doctrines of our Holy Religion, the better, as they think, to satisfy Adversaries, that this is one main Cause of the Growth of Infidelity of late, --- and can never think, that lessening the Necessity or Usefulness of Christianity, bids fair to make Opposers the more willing to embrace Christ :---When we have once yielded, out of*  
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Complaisance, or, perhaps, from better Motives, that Men may do tolerably well under the Conduct of their own Reason, and shall indeed arrive at future Felicity, by following the Light of Nature; but would be much happier, if favoured with the Gospel-Revelation; or if, while blessed therewith, they conformed themselves to its Dictates.—When we have made these or the like Concessions, no Wonder than the Deist rest well satisfied with being happy, — leaving Christians in the full Enjoyment of their better World.—

Doubtless, the true Way to defend Christianity, is to keep close by the Truth, as it is in Jesus, not losing a Stone of the Building, or moving a Foot from the Foundation, but contending earnestly for the whole Faith once delivered to the Saints.—Divine Truths are so linked together,---that, as a Chain, if the first Link is wrested out of our Hands, the second and third follow of Course, till we are insensibly led to make Shipwreck of the Faith altogether.



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REVELATION *the* ONLY SURE  
HOPE *of* SINNERS.

EPHESIANS, II. 12.

— Having no Hope —

**T**HE Apostle *Paul*, in this Chapter, represents to the *Ephesians*, Part of the *Gentile World*, their *formerly* miserable State, when ignorant of *Jesus Christ*, and their *present* happy Situation, by the Revelation and Grace of this Redeemer; and it is evident, that our Text points out their *once* hopeless Condition, with respect to an after-Life, and future Blessedness, while they remained Unbelievers under the Gospel-Dispensation, or rather before their Conversion to Christianity. The Words, taken in this last Sense, give Occasion to observe,

*First*, That Men, destitute of supernatural Revelation, have no *reasonable*, no *certain* Ground to expect a future State of endless Felicity.

At that Time *having no Hope* — at what Time? *When ye were without Christ, being Aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, and Strangers from the Covenants of Promise, i. e.* when ignorant of the Revelation which God had made of himself in *Jesus Christ*, and no way interested in his everlasting Covenant. But,

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adly,

2dly. You'll observe from the Text, as it stands in Connection, That the Gospel of Christ supplies this Defect of Nature's-Light, by giving all rational Assurance of a happy Eternity.

Remember, that at that Time, when Gentiles according to the Flesh, ye were without Christ, having no Hope; but now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the Blood of Christ, and so are begotten again to the lively Hope of a future Inheritance, by his Gospel, which brings Life and Immortality to Light.

'Tis proposed, thro' Divine Assistance, to confirm these two Propositions; and then, because some may probably ask, If Men left to the Dictates of unassisted Nature, are in such a hopeless Condition; if Revelation be so necessary to their Comfort; Why were the *Ephesians* and other *Gentiles* so long deprived of it? Why are there so many Nations still without Christ? For Answer, after taking Notice of what is usually replied to such Questions, we shall endeavour to prove,

3dly. That tho' we could not satisfyingly account for the Divine Conduct in this Matter, yet the Gospel may, nevertheless, be necessary and true; or, in other Words, That the Want of Universality is not a sufficient Reason why it should be rejected as false and spurious.

The Subject of our Enquiry having employed the Learning and Eloquence of many Ages, and filled up numberless Volumes, you cannot expect to hear much, if any Thing at all, new; or even to hear the Argument treated with greater Advantage, within the Compass of a few Minutes: But, as the Apostle is exciting the *Ephesians* to remember

ber what they knew already from past and present Experience, the most infallible Teacher, if we can only be so happy as to place the Argument in the most proper Light, for reviving upon your Minds a grateful Sense of your distinguished Privilege, as blest with the everlasting Gospel, and a feeling Persuasion of their Misery *who are yet sitting in Darkness, and in the Region and Shadow of Death*, we shall then have, in some Measure, answered what is expected, by laying a sufficient Foundation for the Exhortation of the Day.

We observed, *first*, That Men destitute of supernatural Revelation, have no *reasonable*, no *certain* Ground, to expect a future State of endless Felicity.

*Remember, that at that Time ye were without Christ, having no Hope.*

Whoever considers that each Work of an ALWISE ALMIGHTY BEING must be perfect in its Kind, and, at the same Time, views his own *Frame and Make*, will soon be persuaded, that Man, some Time or other, was a glorious Creature; formed for Virtue, and designed for Happiness: Faculties so extended, Powers so vigorous, Passions so lively, Affections so noble and sublime, under due Regulation, are calculate to move in some high Sphere, and were certainly given for the Enjoyment of God in an endless Life, and the glorifying him *by a patient Continuance in Well-doing*.

Hence Man, in Innocence, might *probably* have entertained the agreeable Prospect of being always blessed, while he gave *perfect* and *universal* Obedience to the Divine Law; but now that  
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the Crown is fallen from our Heads, by Reason of Transgression, and we have not abode in Honour, all Hopes of Happiness, founded on *perfect* Obedience, must for ever cease.

Our o'er-Fondness of the Creature, our too languid Love towards God, the secret Averfion of the carnal Mind to Holiness, its growing Pleasure in Sin; yea, each irregular Thought, or misplaced Affection, is a sensible Proof every one feels that Man is not the same innocent Creature which came from the pure Hands of the *All-Forming Jehovah*, but *some how* alter'd, and now unfit for pursuing the great and main End of his Being.

'Tis a mournful Truth, and granted on all Hands, that Mankind have sinned and come short of the Glory of God. *If we say that we have no Sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us:* Therefore, the whole Assurance which *any*, the most perfect of humane Race, can now have of a happy Eternity, must arise from the Knowledge of God's Willingness to pardon Iniquity, and to receive them again into Favour. This the Deist himself does not deny, but maintains the Sufficiency of unassisted Nature for this Purpose; while, on the contrary, we believe with our Apostle, *that when Aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, when Strangers to the Covenants of Promise, we have no Hope, being destitute of a Light to guide our Feet into the Ways of Peace.* Witness those unhappy Nations who never enjoyed the Light of the glorious Gospel, How great their Ignorance of the Means of appeasing angry Heaven! What anxious and endless Sollicitude about the Divine Conduct with guilty Sinners! How fearful do they appear, when  
 entering

entring the unseen World ! How short-liv'd and uncertain the Hopes of even the best and wisest ! What happy Man amongst them, after the utmost Search, could deliver himself from the rack-ing Fears of *Hereafter* ?

An Enquiry into this *melancholy* and *hopeless* State of the Heathen World, would discover even a *Cicero*, a *Plato*, a *Seneca*, a *Socrates*, a *Plutarch*, and their other most knowing Philosophers, so far from being perswaded, that an endless State of Felicity awaits the once guilty, that we should find many, if not all of them at the utmost Uncertainty about a future State *at all* ; sometimes indeed seeming to believe the Doctrine of Immortality, next Moment calling all in Question, still fluctuating amidst Doubts and Fears, every Thing, beyond a Grave, to them *Darkness* and *Mystery*.

This can admit of little Dispute, and it seems to go far in determining the Question ; for, tho' 'tis now pretended, that *mere Reason* is sufficient to point out the Way of Reconciliation, and of Happiness, albeit the Heathens did not discover it ; yet, if the Light Nature affords, is so *dim*, that the most quick-sighted Philosophers found it insufficient, after a Life spent in unwearied Searches, and the most laborious Study, it must have been morally impossible, as has been often observed, for the great Bulk of Mankind, whose Abilities are not equal, nor their Opportunities of Enquiry the same, to have come thus to the Knowledge of the Truth ; and we appeal to our Adversaries themselves, if a *simple Possibility* of such a Discovery, which, because of the Weakness of our Faculties, and Circumstances in a World, is *practically*

*etically impossible*; we appeal to them, if this can in Fact afford more real Comfort to the guilty Mind, or be of any greater Advantage, as superseding the Necessity of *farther* Light, than if the Thing were in itself *absolutely impossible*.

A *simple abstract* Power of knowing what we never shall know, is, to all Purposes in Life, no better than *necessary down-right Ignorance*. It is likewise to be observed, That we might justly reject *present Discoveries*, as what can't be shewn to be the *mere* Product of unassisted Nature, seeing *those* who pretend to them, have all along enjoy'd the Light of Revelation; but allowing them this Advantage, we shall now proceed to examine their Plea, for the Sufficiency of Nature's Light. The Amount of it, as taught by their greatest Masters of Reason, seems to be this,

“ Is not God infinitely happy in himself, and  
 “ can receive no additional Felicity? What then  
 “ could move him to create a World, but to  
 “ communicate Happiness to all his Creatures,  
 “ according to their various Natures? Will he  
 “ be diverted from this gracious Design by their  
 “ overt Acts? Will the Common Parent of Man-  
 “ kind, and the Father of Mercies, make any  
 “ of his poor Children miserable for their Sins,  
 “ which don't disturb his Repose? Can that  
 “ Mercy be infinite and boundless, which with-  
 “ holds from any BEINGS such Blessings as they  
 “ are capable of receiving? Will a gracious God  
 “ reject the humble Penitent? Can Cruelty  
 “ dwell with Goodness itself?” Thus do they de-  
 claim; and, according to them, because Man-  
 kind were originally designed for Happiness, by the  
 the



the Author of their Being, he must bless them, even while they refuse to walk in those Ways which he has appointed as Means to that End. The sovereign Lawgiver of Heaven and Earth renounces the Character of the Common Parent of Mankind, if executing the Sanction of a just and righteous Law; and ceases to be the Father of Mercies, when punishing such Criminals as attempt to dethrone him, because they are his Offspring, and cannot accomplish their hellish Design; at least, should they think proper to return with weeping Eyes, and an afflicted Mind, he must receive them again into Favour, and make them compleatly happy, or Cruelty shall dwell with him for ever; nay, if he does not bless every one in the World to come, Where is his infinite Goodness, his boundless Compassion?

This is the plain Import and Tendency of their Reasoning, and when viewed in this just Light, how vain and daring does it appear?---To be more particular, let it be observed, That the Sinner's Hope, when Revelation is excluded, must flow either from the abstract Notion of infinite Mercy, or from the visible Effects of divine Goodness, or from the Doctrine of Repentance, or, *lastly*, from the End of Government, Laws and Sanctions.----These are the main Topicks whence the Patrons of *Deism* pretend to infer any Thing, with Respect to the final Happiness of Mankind in general, or such of them as repent. *1st*, 'Tis observed, " That Goodness is an Attribute of the Divine Nature, consequently must  
" be *infinite*, Infinity being essential to the Per-  
" fections of the Supreme Being; and seeing in-  
" *finite*

“ *finite* comprehends ALL, 'tis argued, That  
 “ *every* Creature must be the Object of Goodness,  
 “ and one Time or other as happy as it possibly  
 “ can be.”

There seems nothing necessary to shew the Fallacy of this Conclusion, but to observe, That, seeing the Goodness of God has been *at all Times infinite*, it would follow, from the above Reasoning, that Mankind shall not only be happy *one* Time or *other*; but that they have at *all Times*, and in *all Places*, enjoyed the most exquisite Delight; that Pain and Misery never have been, nor can be in the World; the contrary of which every one feels and knows:---Nay, it would likewise follow, that Angels, Men, and the meanest Insect, are *precisely* of the same Kind and Nature, *equally* happy, having the same Capacities and Opportunities of enjoying Good;---for it cannot be denied, that infinite Power could have made them thus equal in every Respect: And if so much as *one* Degree of possible Pleasure or Good is withheld but *one* Moment, from any *one* Creature, it might be asked, upon the foregoing Principles, How is this consistent with infinite Benevolence, which because *infinite* must comprehend *all*, and so at *all Times alike* desire the Happiness of *all*? — “ Fact, as one says in another  
 “ Case, contradicts such fond and extravagant  
 “ Reasonings as these; and they cannot possibly  
 “ be supported, but by carrying Matters still farther, and charging God with Iniquity.”

The Truth of the Matter, my Brethren, is this, God's Power, his Mercy, and other moral Perfections are *infinite*, *i. e.* he is not limited in the  
 Exer-

*sure Hope of Sinners.*

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Exercise of them by superior Influence or foreign Restraint; but how far he will exert any of them in a given Case, Mercy; for Instance, cannot be inferr'd from its abstract Nature, without considering the Relation which, in such a Case, it bears to the other Perfections of the Godhead: There is a beautiful Harmony among them; and the one only acts in so far as is consistent with the Exercise of the whole.

Now, God being a *Judge* as well as a *Father*, *Just* as well as *Merciful* — The Supreme Law-giver, whose Law to Mankind is enforced with proper Sanctions, and Man having transgressed that Law; unless it could be proved, that God is just in justifying the Ungodly, and, that the admitting such *Beings* into Blessedness hereafter, sufficiently answers all the Ends of his Wise Government in the Universal System; except this could be proved; nothing is done to the Purpose, and Men may declaim, as long as they will, upon the Boundless Nature of Divine Pity and Compassion; they may delight themselves with the Hopes of feeling its blest Effects; but shall never be able to convince the unprejudiced, that their Joy has any reasonable Foundation.

So long as we are incapable of knowing the great Evil of Sin, and the Nature of God against whom it is committed; while we cannot say what Method Infinite Wisdom may judge proper to prevent his Laws from being despis'd, and his Government from becoming contemptible; while ignorant what numberless other Systems exist besides our own; and don't know their mutual Relations and Dependencies; or, in one Word, while we can't compre-

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hend the whole Designs of Heaven from first to last; we cannot conclude from the abstract Nature of Mercy, that a blestful Immortality shall be the Privilege of Sinners.

Nor, *2dly*. Can this be inferred from the visible Effects of Divine Goodness —

The Works of Creation and Providence do indeed proclaim the Eternal Power and Godhead of their Author; and amongst them we may likewise trace the Footsteps of *Goodness*. Our Minds are capable of contemplating the sublimest Objects; hence refin'd Delight: Our Bodies are curiously fram'd, and furnish'd with Variety of Senses, which, as so many Avenues, convey Pleasure to the Soul: The Earth provides a thousand agreeable Things for our Comfort: The heavenly Orbs bless us with their benign Influence — The Sun shines, the Rain falls, and we have the regular Return of Seed-Time and Harvest; and 'tis likewise true, that God bears long with rebellious Man: But are these Evidences of Pardoning-Mercy? Where can we read, amongst them, the Character of Forgiveness? Or, does it follow, from our being favour'd with some temporal Blessings, that we shall inherit those which are eternal? On the contrary, when we consider, that, in the present State, all Things come alike to all, that there is one Event to the righteous and to the wicked; nay, that perhaps the *worst* of Men enjoy the greatest Share of Temporal Good; We are led naturally to think with the *inspired Preacher*, that Love or Hatred are not to be known by all that is before us: And as to the Forbearance of God, every one knows, that Forbearance is by no means Forgiveness; and many Reasons might

might be assigned for sparing Sinners a While, tho' there was no Design of making them happy in an after-Life, or even so much as pardoning their Iniquities.

To proceed. As there are many Instances of the Goodness of God in this our World, we see likewise a great deal of *Pain* and *Misery*. To what Distress and Sorrow are we liable, so soon as we begin to breathe? What Trouble and Vexation are the constant Attendants of Childhood and Youth? How great the Uneasiness of riper Years? Is not old Age a Disease of itself, and oft-times unsupportable by many additional Loads and Pressures? Life, from the Cradle to the Grave, with respect to many of Mankind, is one Series of Afflictions, continued in an uninterrupted Succession; And we may frequently observe the Wrath of God revealed from Heaven, in an awful Manner, against the Unrighteousness of Man: So that we can never be sure, from what we see in a World where there is so much Pain and Misery flowing from Sin, that Sin is forgiven, and Sinners shall be happy hereafter.

There are some that do not carry the Matter so far as to say, that the Light of Nature gives Assurance of Happiness to all Sinners; but maintain, that such of them as repent, may be fully persuaded of this Privilege, even without Revelation: And this leads us,

3dly, To consider the *Deists* Plea, taken from the Nature of Repentance.

It must be allowed, that Repentance is not always sufficient to prevent suffering.—“Temperance and Sobriety strengthen the Constitution,”  
“on,

“ on, and promote Health: On the other Hand,  
 “ Intemperance impairs both ; and Things may  
 “ be carried so far, that no After-wisdom, no  
 “ Repentance and Amendment shall be able to  
 “ repair the Loss. \*” Now, seeing this flows  
 from the natural Order of Things, of which God  
 is the Author, why may he not likewise be sup-  
 posed to have ordained, that, when the Mind is  
 once debauched thro’ a voluntary Course of Wic-  
 kedness, and Men have thus weakened and im-  
 paired the Faculties of the Soul, that no After-  
 conviction, no future Endeavour, shall be suffi-  
 cient to deliver from the Horrors of Guilt, and  
 the Effects of Vice, so as to restore *original* Re-  
 citude.---

If God permits Sinners, in this Life, to under-  
 ly the Misery they have foolishly brought upon  
 themselves, tho’ sensible of their Folly, and  
 heartily concerned for it, how does it appear,  
 that Sufferings can’t extend beyond the Limits  
 of Time, and that rather than the repenting Sin-  
 ner should be *one Moment* longer miserable, God  
 must necessarily break thro’, for what natural  
 Light knows, the settled Order and Constitution  
 of Things.

On the contrary, the Passage to that other  
 World being thro’ Death, it would rather ap-  
 pear, that the Sinner was passing from lesser  
 to greater Sorrows, because Death, in itself, is  
 plainly enough a penal Evil, and stamp’d with  
 many Signatures of Heaven’s Displeasure.

Put the Case, that the innocent Inhabitant of  
 some unknown distant World was brought to  
 our

\* Connybear against Tindal, Edit. 2. Page 127.



our Globe, to see a Man struggling in the Agonies of Death, let him be told that this Man had sinned, and afterwards repented, but that, nevertheless, he had been all along subject to Misery as the *Consequence* of Sin, and was now suffering on *that* Account; I believe it would be no easy Matter to persuade such a Being, that Repentance is sufficient to deliver from suffering; that these Pains were now at an End, and those Agonies the certain Passage to Joy and Felicity.

In Opposition to all this, we are told, \* “That  
“ Repentance consists in deep Sorrow for Sin,  
“ Resolutions to reform, and actual Amendment  
“ of Heart and Life: That the true Penitent  
“ mourns for Iniquity, as done against the God  
“ of Mercy; that, out of Love to him, he  
“ forsakes his former evil Courses, and delights  
“ in the Ways of Holiness, that is, becomes just  
“ what God would have him to be; How then  
“ can God punish, or exclude him from his  
“ Presence?”

However specious this may appear, it supposes what is truly impossible, that Nature's Light, the Strength of our own Reason, is sufficient to excite this genuine Sorrow, and that real Return to Obedience.---

An awakened Sinner naturally trembles at the Presence of an offended God, and flies from him thro' Fear of Punishment :---In Proportion to this Fear, Love will cease, and Hatred, or, at least, Aversion encrease: Hence it is impossible that a Sinner should love God, or mourn for Iniquity  
because

\* Several other Things are said, but have so little of Argument in them as not to require an Answer.

because offensive to God, unless he had some previous Assurance of his Readiness to forgive; to suppose which, in the present Argument, is begging the Question: And if he could not make the first Step towards Repentance, shall we believe that he could perform the whole? A small Acquaintance with the degenerate State of the Heathen World may convince, that it is far beyond the Power of sinful Mortals, destitute of supernatural Light and Assistance, to become *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, and to reason themselves from the Death of Sin into a Newness of Life.--But admitting, that a Man by the Light of Nature, and unassisted Reason, could arrive at such genuine Repentance and Amendment, which, at best, is not pretended to be free of Imperfections; Would it not be daring to say, That God behoved, upon this Account, to pardon all his former Crimes, however atrocious, and receive him to the heavenly Felicity?--*Present Obedience* is no more than *present Duty*, and can never atone for past Offences.---- It does not indeed appear reasonable to suppose, this Man placed in the same Circumstances with obstinate Sinners, but perhaps his utmost reasonable Hopes behoved to terminate in Annihilation.

I cannot see how a Creature, whom we shall suppose perfectly innocent, having given universal Obedience to the Law of his Creator, for a certain Term of Years, could, upon his Entrance into some invisible Regions, be absolutely sure of the Continuance of his Being thro' an Eternity of Blessedness, unless it was expressly revealed unto him; because there seems no necessary Connection betwixt God's bestowing Being in one State,

State, and his continuing the same Being in another, and that too for ever; neither does it follow, that the Obedience of the Creature, to which God has Right in every given Point of Existence, and which carries in it its own Reward; that this Obedience intitles, by the very Nature of it, to future and everlasting Favour. — If then Innocence itself could not be absolutely certain what Consequences may attend such a Change as Death; Vain are the Pretences of guilty Sinners, whose Hopes all arise from Repentance, which can merit nothing at God's Hand, nor bring them back to their former State of Innocence and Perfection. — Let us now enquire,

*4thly*, What is said for the Necessity of pardoning Sinners upon their Repentance, from the Nature and End of Government.

Because God, in governing the World, prescribes only such Laws as tend to the Happiness of his Creatures; and because Sanctions are added for the Sake of the Law, and to promote the same End, some late Writers fancy, that none shall be miserable, by the Execution of the annexed Threatning, but the Obstinate and Impenitent; for, according to them, if the Threatning is at all inflicted, it can only be to reclaim the Offender, and must of Consequence cease, when this is obtained by his Repentance.

True it is, that we may say, the Sanctions of the Law are designed for our Good, as they excite to the more careful Performance of Duty, that is, to pursue with greater Eagerness our own Peace and Quiet; but must they necessarily tend to our Happiness, even while we transgress the Law: He

is



is indeed very ignorant of the Nature of Government, either Human or Divine; who imagines, that there is no other Reason for inflicting penal Sanctions, but the reclaiming Offenders.

Is not the Terror of others, and the Good of the Whole; a more noble End, than the particular Advantage of an offending Individual; and may not the Common Cause make it necessary to punish the Criminal, tho' he should thereby be ruined instead of being reformed.

If it be replied, "That human Governors are obliged to cut off the Rebellious; and that Repentance is oft-times not allowed as sufficient to acquit them; because otherwise Society would run into Confusion, and we have no other Methods to prevent its total Destruction, which can never take Place in the Government of the World; because God being All-powerful, and All-knowing, can prevent these Disorders by other Methods."

We might retort the Argument; by shewing, That human Lawgivers must sometimes overlook Offences, for Reasons which cannot influence the *Governor of the World*; or deter him from punishing: But let it suffice to observe, That the allowing Sinners to suffer the just Punishment of their Crimes, seems, to Nature's Light, the most habile Method to contain others within the Bounds of Duty, and the most reasonable Way to prevent, even the Divine Government from becoming contemptible; and we have already shewn the Absurdity of pretending, that God will act in this or that Manner, because one or other of his Perfections render it *naturally* possible, as in the present Instance,

Instance, his *Power*, and his *Knowledge*, the whole of his Attributes must be taken into the Account, and their mutual Relations considered, otherwise; as before hinted, it would be no difficult Matter to prove, from the Nature of infinite Power and infinite Goodness, that Sin, and its fatal Consequences, Pain, Misery and Distress, are Things which never had any Existence, nor can possibly happen.

Now, to sum up the whole Argument, when we reflect on the lamentable State of the Heathen World, when we survey the Works of Creation and Providence, these visible Effects of God's Goodness; — when we entertain the justest Notions of Mercy, as a Perfection of that God, whose Attributes are all infinite; when we enquire into the Nature of Repentance, and the Ends and Design of Government; — or to express all in a few Words, when we consider the *Nature* and *Reason of Things*, particularly the *Nature of God* and *Man*; and, from their *mutual* Relation, make such Inferences as Reason directs, still we can arrive at no certain Knowledge what Methods God will take with the *Guilty*; tho' considered as *repenting* of their Folly, and *returning* from their evil Courses, there remains an *anxious* and *endless* Solicitude about Futurity, an Uncertainty, *whether or not God will turn away from his fierce Anger; that they perish not*; and after all possible Allowances, yea, *impossible* Suppositions granted, even then, they could only hope for *some Mitigation* of the Punishment; thus *dark* and *feeble* is Nature's Light; thus *certain*, that the *Ephesians*, and the rest of the *Gentile World*, *when without Christ*, were with-

out Hope; and that Men destitute of supernatural Revelation, have no reasonable, no assured Ground to expect a future State of endless Felicity. We proceed to shew,

2dly, That the Gospel of Christ supplies this Defect of Nature's Light, by giving all rational Assurance of a happy Eternity.—

A Passage to the unseen World is there *opened*, the Glories of Immortality *displayed*, and the Method of the guilty Creatures attaining eternal Life *clearly* pointed out, thro' Faith in the Merits and Mediation of an *once* crucified, and *now* living Redeemer; that *true* and *lively* Faith which *purifies* the Heart, *worketh* by Love, and *influences* to practise these Things that dispose the Mind for a *future blessed State*. Further, the Gospel contains the most *powerful* endearing Motives to *Stedfastness* in our Way Heaven-ward, and *every where* abounds with Promises of Divine *Aid* and *Assistance*, so that it wants nothing to inspire the joyful Hopes of a *happy Eternity*, provided it be attended with *sufficient* Proofs of its *heavenly Original*.

Now in this Scheme of Redemption, founded upon the *Death* and *Satisfaction* of Jesus the Saviour, so much of God appears, as *sufficiently* recommends it to our *Faith* and *Choice*, as the Appointment of Heaven for the Recovery of fallen Man.—It seems, at first View, *worthy* of the eternal Jehovah, and the *Contrivance* of infinite Wisdom.—Here *all* the Divine Attributes shine with Lustre, that excel in Glory.—Justice is fully satisfied, Divine Veracity and Faithfulness manifested, and the Holiness of God most conspicuous, in not sparing his *own Welbeloved Son*,  
when



when our Substitute, and all this *awful Majesty* sweetned with *boundless Compassion*, in acquitting the Guilty, Sin punished, and yet the Sinner forgiven; Is not our God excellent in Counsel, and wonderful in Working! *Mercy and Truth meet together, Righteousness and Peace kiss each other*, and thus harmoniously conspire to promote the *great, the worthy*, Design of saving Souls from Death.--- Here the *Prerogatives* of the King of Heaven are asserted,---the *Rights* of his Government *secured*, and all his wise Administrations *vindicated*, on the one Hand, from a *rigid Severity*, which might drive *offending Criminals* to Despair; and on the other, from a *silly unreasonable Compassion*, that naturally issues in Contempt. --- No Ground given for charging God with *Cruelty*.---No Handle to despise his *Authority*. --- In fine, While Grace reigns unto eternal Life, *only thro' Righteousness* by Jesus Christ our Lord, *the Law is thereby magnified, and made honourable, and God becomes just, as well as merciful, in pardoning the Believer in Jesus.*

These indeed are but a *few* of the *many* Characters of *Wisdom* and *Goodness* which run thro' the *whole* of this *God-like Work*, and yet, from thence, you see 'tis *every* Way consonant to the *Nature* of God and *Man*, ---and *exactly* adapted to the miserable helpless Circumstances of Sinners. --- But besides these internal Evidences, its Divine Original, is confirmed by all other possible Proofs.---

It was proclaimed by our Redeemer's Harbinger, in the most *proper* and *seasonable* Time, *when the World by false Wisdom knew not God*, and was lying in the grossest Ignorance, with Respect to  
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the Things of Salvation :---It was taught by the *meek and holy Jesus*, in whom was no Guile, whose *admirable Doctrines*, and *wise Precepts* carry in them an Air of Heaven, and are evidently well calculate to promote the *Happiness* of Man, and the *Glory* of the one God : It was confirmed by them who heard him, and particularly his Apostles, who, being *always* with him, had *every Opportunity* of knowing the Certainty of what they attest, *Men* whose Characters, after the *strictest* Scrutiny, appear *fair and just*, *Men of good Report*, and *full of the Holy Ghost* ; *Men* nicely scrupulous, who took nothing upon Trust, and published only *what they saw with their Eyes, heard with their Ears, and handled with their Hands of the Word of Life* ; *Men* who could have no *sinistrous* or *By-ends*, to lead them aside from declaring the Truth ; But, on the contrary, forfeited all the *Pleasures* and *Comforts* of a present World, abandoned every *temporal* Enjoyment, submitted to the *cruellest* Tortures ; nay, did not count Life itself too dear, while they testified the Gospel of the Grace of God with their dying Groans, and sealed it with their Blood.

Neither is this all ; for God appeared remarkably to have been the Author of this great Salvation, by *raising Jesus from the dead, and receiving him into Glory*, and by bearing Witness to his Apostles with *Signs and Wonders, and divers Miracles* :—*Great and marvellous* were the Works which they performed ! *Miracles* were wrought by them at *all Times*, and in *all Places* ; not in a Corner, but *openly* in the Presence of their most *discerning*

cerning and inveterate Enemies ; and that, in Confirmation of their excellent Doctrines, *Miracles* almost infinite in Number, and plainly stamp'd with the Finger of God, being Signs of Goodness, Wisdom and Power, far beyond the human Reach.--- In a Word, to the first Preachers of Christianity was given the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, such as *speaking with Tongues, prophesying, and healing all Manner of Diseases* :---Every Nation heard them speak in their own Language ; Things to come were foretold, *the blind made to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, Lepers were cleansed, and the dead raised*, and that in an Instant, with a mere Word or simple Touch.

We have no Ground to think, that these Works are within the Compass of *created Power*, and they are evidently above all the *natural* or *acquired* Abilities of Men, and so must have been performed by the *immediate* Hand of God, or thro' the Assistance of some good Beings, under the Influence and Direction of God ; for whatever Degrees of Power or Knowledge, malicious wicked Spirits may be supposed to have, it can never be thought, that they would have done *such Works* in Confirmation of a Doctrine undoubtedly calculate to make Men *holy* and *happy* ; this were to suppose *Satan divided against himself*, and the *Enemy* of Mankind their *best* and *greatest* Friend :--And therefore, tho' we don't know the *utmost Extent* of the *Power of Nature* ; however MISTAKEN and CRIMINAL Notions Men (who desire to advance the Cause of Virtue in the Main) may entertain of the Means for promoting this laudable Design ; and tho' 'tis possible they may use some *pious Frauds* ;----yet, for all this,



this, seeing the Founders of our Holy Religion shew a *constant inviolable* Regard to Truth, in nothing terrified by the most *exquisite* Tortures which the *Wit* of their Enemies could invent, or their *Power* and *Malice* inflict, when their *only* Design seems to be the promoting true Religion, and their *whole Labour* and *Life* itself is spent in glorifying the Ever-blessed God, and advancing the real Good of Mankind ;--- and when such Miracles are wrought, in Testimony of their Pretences to a Divine Warrant, as were *obviously* above human Strength ; nay, remarkable Signs of the greatest Goodness, the most excellent Wisdom, and extensive Power :— On all these Accounts, either we must credit their Testimony, as commissioned from on high, or deny the *Possibility* of God's revealing himself at all to Mankind in a *supernatural Way*.— If *all* Circumstances considered, an Impostor might come recommended with *such* Credentials, if God should raise him up as he did Christ ; or, which is the same Thing, as to our Argument, permit him to rise from the Dead, after he had taught such pure Doctrines, and placed the *Proof* of their *Divine Original* on this Event.— Then farewell *supernatural Revelation* ; no Criterion is left, by which we can distinguish *between the Voice of him who speaketh from Heaven, and him that speaketh on Earth*.

There seems *no Character* wanting to prove the *Gospel-method of Salvation truly divine* ; the internal Evidences, the Signs of *Wisdom* and *Goodness* contained in it, speak for themselves ; and the Instances of *Power* and *Knowledge* given by the Preachers of this Doctrine, are Matters of Fact  
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attested by *all* these *Mediums* of which the Nature of the Thing is capable.—Time indeed obliges us to take this for granted, and to suppose that Christ *died* and *rose* again, that *such Miracles*, as before-mentioned, were *wrought*, and that many *remarkable* Events, depending, in a *great Measure*, on the Will of free Agents, were foretold by Jesus and his Apostles.—But I shall here put you in Mind of what several Writers have observed, that the very Denial of this Fact, lays the Adversaries of Revelation under a Necessity of allowing what would *equally* prove the Truth of Christianity, namely,

That a *few* poor ignorant Fishermen, of mean Extract, and no Learning, who pretended to be the Followers of the crucified Jesus, did, by publishing to the World a *Religion*, contrary to *all* the *Lusts* and *Passions* of Men, and their most *inveterate Prejudices*,—a *Religion*, which teaches to prefer *Hunger* and *Nakedness*, *Suffering* and *Death*, before *all* these *Pleasures* and *Honours* which Mankind value and esteem, and which assures its Votaries, that they *must* suffer Persecution: It obliges them to suppose, that such an *inconsiderable* Body of *illiterate timorous Men*, stript of all worldly *Pomp* and *Grandeur*, thus destitute of the *Force of Arms*, or *Power of Eloquence*,—and without working *any Miracle* at all, to prove that they were countenanced by some *superior Agents*, did, by teaching *such self-denying Truths*, overturn all other established Religions, destroy the Kingdom of Satan, pull down the Temple of Idols,—fill the Earth with the true Knowledge of God,—reform the Lives and Hearts of Men, and brought  
*all*

*all* under Subjection to a *despised Jesus*; — particularly the *Roman Empire*, that once famous Seat of Learning, so renowned for the most *acute Philosophers*, and *brightest Wits*. —

That the *Doctrine of the Cross* should thus force its Way throughout the World, amidst the *Rage of Men and Devils*, and notwithstanding the *universal Prejudice of all Sorts*, the *Disputings of the Philosopher*, the *Power of the Mighty*, and the *Wisdom of the Great*, — and that it has now stood the *Test* for near 2000 Years, without being convicted of the *least Fraud or Imposture*; after the *strictest Scrutiny* of its most *skilful indefatigable Enemies*, and tho' *frequently treated with Contempt and Ridicule*, and, at other Times, brought to the *Touchstone of Fire and Faggot*; — this indeed is an astonishing Proof of Divine Power. —

When we consider the Nature of the Christian Religion, and particularly, that the preaching of a crucified Jesus, *was to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Foolishness*; when we reflect upon the *innumerable Difficulties* it had to overcome; — its *Progress and speedy Propagation*, tho' surrounded with *Calumny and Reproach, Bonds and Death*, seems *truly surprising, even* allowing that it was attested by Miracles; but take away the *Supposition of Miracles*, and then, “The Method by  
“ which the Kingdom of Jesus was founded, is  
“ seemingly as disproportionate to the End, as  
“ Fire is to cool, Ice to warm, and Light to dar-  
“ ken; who then, but God alone, could give  
“ Success to such an Enterprize.” — We see therefore, that the Adversaries of Christianity would but mend their Cause *very little*; should they deny



deny, that *Signs* and *Wonders* were performed by these who revealed it to Mankind; the wisest of them seem convinced of this, and so have never so much as *once* attempted to disprove the Fact, but after all their *Boasts* and *Threats*, have produced *only* some Metaphysical Subtilties, plainly founded on the *Disproportion* of our Faculties to the *Nature* of the Subject; which ought no more to shake our *Faith*, or make *us* reject *plain* Evidence, than Arguments against the Existence of *Matter*, or *Spirit*, should convince those who can't unfold their Sophistry, that they have neither *Soul* nor *Body*, *i. e.* don't exist at all. —

We are told, That *whatever* Countenance was given from Heaven to the Truth of the Gospel, *at its first Promulgation*, it can be of little or no Consequence to us; because, say they, the Christianity *now* believed, is not the *same* with that taught by Jesus and his Apostles, for *ancient* Writings are liable to *Corruption*, and may be very much *perverted*, thro' the *Ignorance* or *Inadvertancy* of Transcribers, or by the *Artifice* of designing Men. As this Objection depends wholly on *Maybe's*, and *Possibilities*, without any Proof, it might justly be disregarded as quite insignificant; and 'tis surprising, that *Gentlemen*, who demand *Demonstration* for every Thing Christians say, should imagine, that their *bare Word* will be admitted as Argument, and that too, in Opposition to the *strongest Evidence* could be expected; — For the *great Antiquity* of the *Alexandrian*, and other Versions, which may have been taken from some of the Originals; — the *early Translation* of the Gospels into different Languages; — their *exact Har-*

mony, even at this Day, as to every Thing material ;— the *numerous Copies* of them that were soon dispersed throughout the World ; — the *Citations* taken from them by the most antient Writers ;— the *Difference* amongst Christians, which made them strictly watch one another, and who would have loudly complained, of any *remarkable Alteration* in Favour of their Opposite ; — the *Silence* of their Adversaries, who don't charge them with curtailings, or altering, or adding ; — their *frequent* and *careful* Perusal of the Scriptures in their *publick* Assemblies ; — the *Concern* which good Men may be supposed to have, for handing down their Religion *pure* and *intire* ; — and, above all, the Providence of God : — These Things have been oftentimes well illustrate, as so many standing Confutations of alledged *Forgery* and *Corruption*, and give good Ground to believe, that the Gospel conveyed to us, is *precisely* the same with *the Faith originally delivered to the Saints*, especially as to its *essential* Doctrines.— The so much talked of 30000 *various Readings* in the Copies of the *New Testament*, as they stand at present, are no more than what must necessarily have been the Case, without an *immediate* and *miraculous* Interposition of Heaven, conducting the Hand of *every* Transcriber, which does not seem at all needful, or could reasonably be expected. — An ingenious Author observes, “ That *Terence* is now in one of the best  
 “ Conditions of any of the *Classick* Writers ; and  
 “ affirms, I have seen 20000 various *Lectons* in  
 “ that little Author, not near so big as the whole  
 “ *New Testament* ; and am morally sure, that if  
 “ Half the Number of Manuscripts were collected  
 “ for

“ for *Terence*, with the *Niceness* and *Minuteness*  
 “ which has been used in twice as many for the  
 “ New Testament, the Number of the Variations  
 “ would amount to above 50000 \*.

It deserves your particular Notice, that the *far greater Part* of the different Readings said to be found in the Copies of the New Testament, respect *mere Punctilios*, such as the *spelling*, or *Order* of the Words, &c. which don't at all affect the Sense;—*others* of them are so far from *corrupting* or *perplexing*, that they tend much to *clear* and *illustrate* the sacred Text, and *very few* of the Copies are defective in Things of Moment, what is omitted in one Place being taught in another.—I shall only add, that whereas 'tis urged, that Corruptions have been detected; this, instead of weakening, strengthens the *Probability* of the Genuineness of the Scriptures, as it discovers a *solicitous Care* in Christians to expose *every* Fraud, and not to allow *any* the *smallest* Imposition to pass *unobserved* and *uncensured*.

On the whole, we may conclude, that the Gospel is to us, as well as to these who lived in the first Ages of Christianity, a *sure* and *certain* Way to Happiness;—and that, even at this Distance of Time, while we survey these sacred Truths concerning the Redemption of fallen Man, heavenly Glories present to our View; while we read, a sure and an abundant Entrance opens to the everlasting Kingdom of our God and Saviour, and the true Christian has *all rational Assurance* of a happy Eternity.

Several

\* Remarks on a Discourse of Free-thinking, by *Phileas-therus Lipsiensis*.



Several other Difficulties have been objected to the Christian Scheme, which a late incomparable Writer \* hath shewn to be no Argument against the Credibility thereof, and that these Objections strike *equally* against natural Religion, nay, against the settled Order of Nature; so that he who denies the one, *because* of these Objections, must *likewise* deny the other, and betake himself to *downright Atheism*.

The Abettors of Infidelity seem to triumph most in the *limited Promulgation of the Gospel*; and because this has a Foundation in the Text, which represents the *Ephesians* as once in a hopeless State, being *without Christ*, we shall consider it a little, — and shew, as was proposed,

3dly, That tho' the Gospel *Revelation* can't be said hitherto to be *universal*, it may, nevertheless, be *necessary* and *true*; or, in other Words, that the want of *Universality* is not a sufficient Reason why it should be rejected as *false* and *spurious*.

The Strength of the Objection lyes in the following Questions. If Nature's Light be *deficient*, and the Gospel *necessary*, why was not this Revelation given *sooner*? Why delay'd till the Days of *Tiberius*? Why not communicated to *all*? Why preach'd only to a *few*, the far greater Bulk of Mankind lying in *deplorable Ignorance*?

To these and the like Questions, which are often proposed with an Air of *Victory* and *Ridicule*, 'tis usually replied.

That, *immediately* upon the Fall, a Revelation was given to Mankind, suited to their Condition:

\* Butler's Analogy.

on:—That God continued to declare his *Mind* and *Will*, from Time to Time, according to their Circumstances:—That tho', before the Coming of Christ, Revelation was principally intended for the Service of the *Jews*, yet it was not so restricted to them, as to be *wholly unknown* or *useless* to other Nations:—That Christ did actually appear in the most *proper Season*, when the degenerate State of the World called for such an Interposition of Heaven; and the Success of the *Roman Arms* made the *Promulgation* of Christianity *more easy*:—That the Christian Scheme abrogates the *Peculiarities* of the *Jewish* Constitution, and is evidently calculate to be the Religion of Mankind, as it contains *nothing peculiar* to one Nation more than *another*:—That its Divine *Author* commanded his Apostles to make Disciples out of *all Nations*, by publishing the Gospel to *every Creature*; that, *in Fact*, by their preaching, it had incredible Success, and became *very early* the established Religion of the whole *Roman Empire*: That, albeit it was not preached in *China*, *Tartary*, *America*, and some other Places at the *same Time*, whose *State of Barbarity*, perhaps, render'd them not so fit for receiving the *Refinements* of Christianity;—that yet the *Sun of Righteousness* has gone on *gradually* enlightening those *dark Places of the Earth*; and that *the Fulness of Time* is fast approaching, *when the Knowledge of the Lord shall fill the Earth as the Waters cover the Seas*, making both *Jews* and *Gentiles* one in Christ Jesus.—  
And

When it is still urged as a *necessary Character* of Divine Revelation that it be communicated, not  
only

only *one Time* or *other* to *all Nations*, but to *all Nations* at *one* and the *same Time*, and to *every Person alike*. --- It is replied, That the Objection is of *equal Weight* against natural Religion ; because all Men have not the *same Capacities*, nor the *same Opportunities* of knowing the Laws of Morality ; nay, that 'tis subversive of God's natural Government in the World, wherein we see, not only a *Variety* of Creatures of *different Orders* and *Ranks*, but the *greatest Difference* amongst Beings of the *same Species*, as to their *Constitution*, their *Health*, and *other Advantages* of obtaining temporal Felicity : And if notwithstanding such promiscuous Distribution, it is still true, that God exercises a *natural* and *moral Government* over the World, and is the Author of that *Constitution*, whence this Variety proceeds.---Why may he not make the *same Difference* amongst Men, by a *particular Revelation* ? --- 'Tis also observed, " That were *Revelation universal*,  
 " yet, from Mens *different Capacities* of Under-  
 " standing, from the *different Length* of their  
 " Lives, their *different Education*, and other ex-  
 " ternal Circumstances, and from their *Difference*  
 " of *Temper*, and *bodily Constitution*, their *religious*  
 " *Situations* would be *widely different* \*," as appears *in Fact* from the *Face* and *Circumstances* of the Christian World ; and 'tis added,---That every merciful Allowance shall be made for the Disadvantages Men labour under ; and that they who act up to the Light which God has favoured them with, shall be accepted of him ; not indeed on Account of *such Works*, but for the Sake of the Saviour ;--- whose Merits, 'tis alledged, may extend

\* Butler's Analogy, Quarto Edit. P. 221.



tend *even to those* who have not heard of him, as it does to Children, who are not arrived at the Years of *Faith and Understanding*. —

My Brethren, in several of these Observations there is much Justness of Thought, and great Strength of Reason ; only we would notice, that the last Remark is not *universally* adopted by Christian Writers, nor does it appear agreeable to several Passages of holy Writ ; and certainly it is not needful to say, ( in Support of the present Argument ) that some, who have never heard of Christ, may, notwithstanding, be accepted for his Sake. What hinders the Christian Scheme from being true, tho' not *universally promulgate at all Times*, and to *all Persons*, even on the Supposition of its being *absolutely necessary*, and the *actual Knowledge* of Christ the *only Way* to eternal Life ? It cannot be objected, — “ Then none of the “ Heathens shall be saved ; ” — for if God intends any of them as the *Monuments* of his Grace, and the *Instruments* of his Praise thro' Eternity, he can give them an *internal Revelation*, and communicate, in an *immediate Way*, the Knowledge of Jesus, while they are in the *very Passage* to the other World, can determine them to build their Hopes on this Saviour, and sanctify them thoroughly by his Spirit ; thus, at once, bestowing a Title to *everlasting Life*, and disposing them for the *blessful Enjoyment*.

But further, Let us suppose an *external Revelation* absolutely necessary to Salvation ; may not the want of this be *much owing* to the Neglect of those who are deprived of it. — Experience taught them, that they were in a State of *Sin and Corruption*,  
and

and this, if duly adverted to, should have stirred them up to seek every possible Mean of Relief, particularly, by enquiring at other Nations with whom they had Intercourse; and we may venture to affirm, that had they been *equally solicitous* to know the Things of Eternity, as to extend their *Trade and Commerce*, the far greater Part of the Heathen World would have long ere now come in this Way to the *external Knowledge* of Jesus. — Nay, who can say, but that God, in the Course of his Providence, would have favoured all of them with this Discovery, so that their *present hopeless State* may be considered as the just Punishment of their *own Folly and Neglect*.

'Tis true, this will not so well account for the want of the Gospel, with respect to *every Individual*; and therefore, *allowing if you will*, that there are *certain Persons*, who have it not in their Power to attain the Knowledge of Christ, which yet is *necessary* to the heavenly Felicity: But what then? Seeing, as before proved, God is under *no Obligation* to bestow eternal Life upon the *most perfect innocent Creature whatever*; and consequently, if it could be supposed, according to the Opinion of some, That their Being was to cease with their Existence in this World, it could never be pretended, that they were *cruelly and unjustly* treated: And we believe, the greater Part of the Patrons of Infidelity would be well satisfied that there was no future State. —

But must not the Heathen *live hereafter*? And what if they live in Misery? *Still there is no Injustice with God*: Are they not Sinners? Have not the best amongst them fallen far short, of what they

they might have done for God and Eternity? — And tho' *unavoidably ignorant* of many Duties, may not God justly punish them for *wilful Ignorance*, for not attending to the Light given them, or for not acting agreeably to *what they did know*, and that in a *greater or lesser Degree*, according to the Nature of their *voluntary Wickedness*, or *culpable Neglects*? — And may not this Method of dealing with them, appear fit and reasonable to *infinite Wisdom*, as answering many valuable Purposes in the Divine Government, particularly, the exciting other *Systems* of BEINGS to the Practice of their Duty; and thus tend to promote the *general Good* of the *rational World*.

But what if their Sufferings, in an After-State, shall not *flow wholly* from their *own Neglect*, or *wilful Transgressions*? This, I am sure, is going the utmost Length, and places the Objection in the strongest possible Light; and yet even this State of the Case admits of a Solution.

We all know, that Mankind are, in this Life; under an *unavoidable Necessity* of underlying Pain and Distress, both in a *natural and moral Sense*, and, in many Cases, *absolutely destitute* of the proper Means of Relief. — And we see a great deal of this Misery brought upon them; not as the *Consequence* of their *own Folly or Vice*, but *flowing* from their *very Situation in a World*, and these *diseased Bodies* and *disordered Minds* with which they are born; — and that no *After-thought*, no *prudent Care* or *Endeavour*, can extricate them out of these Difficulties; and what is there more absurd, in supposing some of them under the *same Necessity* of *suffering hereafter*.



The Circumstances of *Time* and *Place* cannot so alter the Nature of Things, as that what is *just* and *merciful* in this World, may nevertheless be *unjust* and *unmerciful* in the next. For Instance, If *Methuselah*, under the Divine Government in *this State*, was subjected, for 969 Years, to the painful Consequences of the *corrupted disordered Constitution* which he had from the *Womb*; — Why may not one who has lived here in the like Distress, only for 69 Years, suffer under the Divine Government in an *After-State* for 900 more? And if he may suffer for 900, why not for 1000, and so on. — However difficult it may seem to reconcile with our Notions of *Justice* and *Equity*, the allowing one to suffer a *great deal*, without any Default of his own, it is *equally difficult* to account for his Suffering at all; and perhaps, the *same Reason* that can be assigned for the *one*, may be assigned for the *other*. — If it be incompatible with *Justice* and *Mercy* to permit such a Being to suffer 100 Degrees of Pain, must it not be *incompatible* with the *same Justice* and *Mercy*, to permit him to suffer *so much as one*? The *Number* or *Kind*, the *Greatness* or *Duration* of the Sufferings, don't vary the Nature of *Just* and *Right*; and if he may, in a Consistency with these Perfections, be liable to *so many Degrees* of Misery, How shall we determine the *precise Number*, or *fix the Limits*, to go beyond which, it would be *unjust* and *unmerciful*?

I expect we shall be told, That as this State of Things is but a Part of our Duration, those *temporary Pains* may be balanced by *future Pleasures*, and that if we be upon *the whole happy*, if the *Sum Total* of *possible Pleasure*, exceed the *Sum Total* of *Pain*,

*Pain*, this is consistent enough with *Goodness*; and there may be wise Reasons, for allowing Beings to pass thro' *certain Degrees of Misery to Happiness*;—whereas, upon our Supposition, one may be born without a *proper Balance of Pleasure*, or the *Chance of compleat Happiness* in any given *Place*, or *Point of Duration*.

The Answer is obvious, Suppose Men *now* in this Situation, yet they may have had the *fairest Opportunity* of being happy, that they could in *Justice* or *Wisdom* have demanded.

Their present Condition evidently respects *some Thing past*, as well as *somewhat future*.

Put the Case, That Mankind are the Children of one *Common Father*, whom God appointed their *Head and Representative*, placing their *future Happiness or Misery* upon his *good or bad Conduct*; and, for this End, instituted, that they should descend from him in the *ordinary Course* of Generation,—whence they would *necessarily* become Partakers, either of his *righteous or sinful Nature*.

Suppose this Man *perfect and innocent*, placed in the most advantageous Circumstances for maintaining his Integrity, all proper Instructions given him of the Terms upon which he and his Descendents were to *stand and fall*, and his Abilities *every Way* equal to his Duty.

Suppose further, That if this our *Federal Head* had stood his Ground, then we, his Posterity, had been secured of *Happiness and Immortality*, beyond the *Possibility* of a Disappointment; but having transgressed, we were considered as sinning in him, and so now liable to the fatal Consequences of Sin, our whole Natures being corrupted, as proceeding  
from

from this *impure Fountain*.—On this Supposition, you see how the *Sum total* of our *possible Pleasure*, was equal to the *Sum total* of our *possible Pain*; and that Men may have had the *fairest Opportunity*, not only of being happy *some Time* or *other*, but from the *first Moment* of their Existence, thro' *endless Ages*; and nevertheless they may *now* come into the World amidst *Distress*, and the Prospect of *future Misery*. Whatever Countenance this may receive from the Scripture-History, is not our present Business to enquire; we demand only, That it may be allowed as a *possible Supposition*; and this cannot well be refused, seeing it is *so analogous* to God's *ordinary Method* of dealing with his Creatures in the Course of Providence, and to the very Law of their Creation, which frequently subjects Children to the unhappy Influence of their Parents *Folly* or *Vices*; and, I need not say, That it is every Way agreeable to many Laws *acknowledged to be just* in human Government, that deprive Children of certain *Advantages* for the mere *Crimes* of their Parents, and make whole Societies *suffer* or *flourish* for the good or bad Management of their *Representatives*.

Whatever Difficulties attend this Supposition, sure they are not lessened by the *opposite Scheme*, this Method being apparently *as much*, if not *more*, for the real Interest of Mankind, than any other could have been; and their Prospect of Happiness founded upon the Condition of the first Man's *perfect Obedience*, who was *sinless* and *holy*, more *sure* and *certain*, than if our Lot were to be determined by our acting up to the Extent of our *present Powers*, when *so corrupted*, and surrounded



rounded with powerful Temptations. And may we not here ask, If it is not more agreeable to our Notions of *Justice*, to consider Mankind as suffering, because guilty in the Eye of the Law, having sinned in their common Root and Father, than to consider them as *innocent in every View*, and yet liable to the Consequences of Sin?---

'Tis true, the Objection supposes, that they may be passing thro' *Misery to Happiness*; but how disagreeable is this to the *Infidel's* usual Notion of *absolute Goodness*? If God be *all-wise, all-powerful, all Mercy*, does it not seem more consistent with these his Perfections to suppose, that he would have prevented *Innocence* from suffering at all?— They would not fail to ask us on any other Occasion, what would we think of a *Legislator*, who, without *Necessity*, treated his *innocent Subjects* in this Manner, but that he was either *unwise, or weak, or wicked*? And are not *Weakness, Wickedness, or Folly*, removed at an *infinite Distance* from the supreme Being?

The Sum of what we have offered is, in short, That we see Mankind in this World under an *unavoidable Necessity* of suffering both in *Body and Mind*, in a *less or greater Degree*, and that frequently, not as the Consequence of any *Ouvert-act* of *their own*; and if they may thus suffer in *this World*, without any *Default of their own*, why not also in the next? And if for *an hundred Years*, why not for *a thousand*? and so on. When 'tis objected, That this is to suppose them miserable without any Chance of complete Happiness?—

'Tis answered, That they may, nevertheless, have had the *fairest Opportunity* of *endless Bless*, which  
was

was illustrate by a very possible Supposition ; and when 'tis added, that there may be wise Reasons from what is *to come*, for subjecting Innocence to such Sufferings, though we don't distinctly know them ; 'tis replied, that there may be wise Reasons also *from what is past*, for permitting them to undergo, even *in an After-state*, the painful Consequence of that sinful polluted Nature which they bring with them into the World : From all which it follows, that *supernatural Revelation* and *Assistance* may be *absolutely necessary* to recover Mankind from their fallen miserable Estate, and yet *in Justice* denied ; and what God is not obliged to give *to any*, he may certainly, for Reasons known to himself, bestow *upon some*, without giving it *to all*, as he does daily, in the Course of Providence, confer his Favours upon *this* or that *ather Person*, or *Nation*, according to *his good Pleasure*. And thus you see, that the *Christian Scheme* may be true, tho' not *universally promulgate* at *all Times*, and to *all Persons*, even on the Supposition of its being *absolutely necessary*, and the Knowledge thereof the *only Way* to Eternal Life. — And this may serve also to satisfy the most *rigid Contender* for the Doctrines of *particular Election*, that he need not depart *one Jota* from his received Principles, the better to support the Divinity of his holy Religion. —

And whereas some may alledge, That it can never be thought, God will permit *such Numbers* of Mankind to suffer both *here* and *hereafter*, 'tis proper to notice, that this proceeds from our slight Notions of Sin, as if a *small* and *light Thing*. — Did we view its *hainous Nature* in a just Light, as committed against *Goodness itself*, — it would rather

ther fill us with Wonder, that *any one* Sinner should be saved, than that *Thousands* of them should be left to perish; and sure we are, this is not near *so surprising*, nor such a *mysterious Part* of the Divine Conduct, as *that* of God's having permitted *Sin* and *Misery* to be in the World *at all*; — and however *many* of Mankind may suffer the just Punishment of their Crimes, they may bear but a *small Proportion* to the rational Creation in general, and Good may upon the *whole* greatly prevail.

It might be added, That the other Methods of Salvation of Mens devising, would by no Means increase the Number of the *happy*; Let the Rule be, That these shall be saved, who act up to the Light they are favoured with, and wherein they fall short, by the *Force* or *Power* of Temptation, *truly repent* and *truly reform*. — On this supposed *benevolent Scheme*, I don't see how *any one* could be saved; for where shall we find *one such Person*, in *any Age* or *Nation*, who has acted, in *all Respects*, in this Manner, even after *every merciful Allowance* is made for the Disadvantages he laboured under: — The *universal Corruption* of Mankind, and their repeated *wilful Ouvert-acts*, — is a *Phenomenon* in the *moral World*, which loudly speaks out, that either Men must be screened from Wrath, *under the Vail* of a *Redeemer's Righteousness* drawn over them, by the *Hand of Faith*, or *perish in their Sins*.

Thus we have endeavoured to prove, that Men destitute of *supernatural Revelation*, have no *reasonable*, no *certain* Ground to expect a future State of endless Felicity. — That the Gospel of Christ supplies the Defect of Nature's Light, by giving  
all



all *rational Assurance* of a *happy Eternity*. And; *Lastly*, That tho' the *Christian Scheme* has not hitherto been *universally known*, it may nevertheless be necessary and true.

It remains, that we apply what has been said; and because this Discourse has already extended beyond the usual Bounds, tho' not further than the *Importance* and *Nature* of the Subject required; what we would now offer, shall be confined to the following Exhortations.---And,

*First*, As the Apostle advises the *Ephesians*, so let us remember with the *warmest Sense* of Gratitude, That we, in this Land, were *once as far off without Christ*, having *no Hope beyond a Grave*; but now are brought nigh by the Blood of Jesus, and begotten again, by the everlasting Gospel, to the lively Hope of an *immortal and undefiled Inheritance*.—Let us adore the Depth of *Wisdom* and *Goodness*, who delivered our Forefathers first from *Heathenish Darknes*, and afterwards from *Popish Superstitions*, and *damnable Delusions*; surely the *Lines have fallen unto us in pleasant Places*, and we have a *goodly Heritage*. We are the happy People, who are blessed with the *joyful Sound of Peace on Earth*, and *Goodwill towards Men*;—thro' the tender Mercy of our God, the Day spring from on high has visited us, and the Sun of Righteousness has arisen to guide our Feet into the Ways of Peace. Unto us is given the Knowledge of Salvation by the Remission of Sins: *He hath not dealt so with every Nation*; while others are left to search out Forgiveness amongst the *Works of Creation* and *Providence*, where it never can be found; we are admitted into the Sanctuary, where *redeeming Love* shines

shines with the *brightest Lustre*; where all the Riches of *pardoning Mercy* are displayed; *Not for Works of Righteousness that we have done, but thro' the Grace and Kindness of Jesus the Saviour.* How great, how unspeakable his distinguishing Goodness! May we ever love him, esteem him, and adore him: And seeing he has brought *Life and Immortality* to Light, let us transport our selves, upon the Wings of *Faith and Hope*, to these Regions of Bliss, and join the Ransomed above, that innumerable Company who stand before the Throne, saying with a loud Voice, *Worthy is God, and worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive Power, Riches, Wisdom, Strength, Honour, Glory and Blessing.*

2dly, We ought carefully to improve the *high Privilege*, and *manifold Advantages* that we enjoy under the Gospel-dispensation,—and should be solicitous to know the Truth in the *Power and Love* thereof.

*Paul* considers the *Ephefians* as in a *hopeless State*, not only when destitute of the *external Knowledge* of Christ, but also when not *savingly enlightened* by his Spirit. It is not enough that the Light shine around us; *we are blind*, and the Veil must be taken off *our Eyes*, e're it can shine into our Hearts, so as to give us the *true Knowledge of the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus*.—It is not they *who hear*, but they who *experimentally know* the joyful Sound, that are *blessed and happy*.—It is not a Christ *without us*, but a Christ *in us*, that is, the Hope of Glory.—We are naturally *dead in Trespasses and Sins*, and; *until quickned* by the *Power* of the living God, can give but a deaf Ear to the charming Sound;

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should it charm never so sweetly, and must remain Strangers to the Comforts of the *Divine Life*. What will it avail to be told of a Saviour, if not interested in his Salvation? To hear that his Blood cleanseth from all Sin, if not *actually washed* in this Fountain?—Many, who have heard of the *Mercy of the Lamb*, shall perish by the *Wrath of the Lamb*:—Nay, this shall be the *Condemnation*, that *Light* came into the *World*, but they loved *Darkness*, rather than the *Light*:—And in the last and awful Day, the Despisers of Christ shall perish inevitably amidst Flames more intolerable than those which consumed Sodom and Gomorrah.—All this sounds an Alarm, and calls aloud unto us, to improve the *Day of our merciful Visitation*, humbly depending on the *Holy Spirit*, for working that Faith in us, which unites unto *Jesus* the Saviour, and for forming our Minds into his *Divine Temper and Life*; thus shall we have a Right to the *Inheritance of the Saints in Light*, and be rendered meet to partake of that *pure and glorious State*.

3dly, Have they no Hope who are without Christ? Then let us be deeply affected with the deplorable Condition of ignorant Unbelievers amongst ourselves, and with the miserable State of other Nations, to whom the Gospel has not yet been preached. Do we daily taste of the *Consolations* that are in Christ? Do we partake of the *Comforts* of his Gospel, and the *Fellowship* of the Spirit? Do we live amidst the joyful Hopes of *Immortality*? And shall we not drop a Tear in Behalf of these unhappy Persons, who either know not, or care not for these Things, who are yet sitting in *Darkness*, and in the *Shadow of Death*?

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We justly compassionate our Fellow-creatures on Account of their *various bodily Distempers*; but how much more Sympathy is due to *afflicted distressed Souls*? — Think of them, my Brethren, as wandering in *endless Labyrinths and Mazes*, in Search of Truth, and still ignorant of *God and Christ*, and many Things *absolutely necessary* to their *present Comfort* and *after Happiness*. — View them travelling on to the *Eternal World*, not knowing whither they are going. See them oblig'd to enter the *dark Abodes* of the *King of Terrors*, amidst the *greatest Agony* and *Horrors* of Mind, *Guilt* staring them in the Face, and no *reasonable Prospect* of *Pardon* and *Redemption*; and let this *pitious Case* mould your Souls into the most *genuine Concern*, and excite a *Fellow-feeling* of their Distress, considering, that you yourselves were once in like Darkness. Even the *Deist Divine Socrates* could go no farther at his Death, than to say, “I  
“ am now about to die, but ye shall live; but  
“ which of us shall be in the better [State, God  
“ only knows. — Can a *true Christian* read these Words without *adoring* the *Saviour* who has delivered him from *all anxious Thoughts* about *Future*, and feeling, at the same Time, a sensible *Concern* for a *poor Heathen World*? Doubtless *miserable perishing Sinners* are the most *proper Objects* of our *Christian Charity*, and justly claim a *large Share* of our *common Humanity*. And this leads me to

Exhort, 4thly, All now hearing me to shew their Compassion, by remedying, to the utmost of their Power, the *hopeless Condition* of such Sinners. —

Time

Time would fail me to illustrate the various Ways how even *private Christians* may be useful in promoting the Conversion of others, — by *warm Addresses*, for Instance, to the Throne of Grace in their Behalf; — by *Instruction* and *Advice*, and particularly by an *exemplary Walk* and *Conversation*, copying out in their Lives the *amiable Precepts* of our holy Religion, and the lovely Pattern of its *Divine Author*. Were each of us thus careful to give Unbelievers a *sensible Proof* of the *Usefulness* and *Excellency* of Christianity, setting before them a *living Instance* to what a Pitch of *Glory* and *Felicity* it raises the Mind formed after its Model, it would soon diffuse its happy Influence far beyond what we can well imagine: But as all Christians are not *equally qualified* for teaching others; as *their particular Callings* render it impracticable for them to bestow *so much Time* and *Pains* as is necessary; and as there are *vast Numbers*, both in *our own* and *foreign Countries*, who have not Access to be benefited by our *Instruction* or *Example*; something more is needful than our *mere personal Labour*. If we would *wish*, or *expect Mankind* to come to the Knowledge of the Truth, *Ministers* must be *ordained*, and *Teachers* set apart, — who shall have it for their *proper Work* and *Business* — to visit the *dark Places* of the *Earth*, pointing out the Way to Salvation, thro' the Remission of Sins; by *instructing the young*, and *preaching the everlasting Gospel* unto all; — For how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a Preacher? — And how shall they preach except they be sent?

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For accomplishing these valuable Purposes, you all know a *Society* was *many Years ago* erected in *Scotland* under the Shade of lawful Authority, and is still in Being. A *Society* constitute of *many valuable* and *honourable* and *Reverend Members*; — whose Praise are in the Churches, whose Names, we doubt not, shall be had in everlasting Remembrance, and whose *zealous Endeavours* for *propagating Christian Knowledge*, and *real Virtue*, has been remarkably countenanced from on high; of which you may have one satisfying Proof, by turning your Eyes to the Children of the *Orphan Hospital*, a School, tho' not *originally* of the *Society's* erecting; yet *now flourishing* under their *Protection* and *Influence*. — This goodly Number of the *once helpless* and *destitute*, rescued from *Hunger* and *Nakedness*, and decently cloathed, not *from afar*, but with the Labour of their *almost Infant-Hands*; while, at the same Time, their tender Minds are early imprest with a Sense of *God* and *Religion*; these Things give us the *hopeful Prospect*, that their After-Lives shall prove *comfortable to themselves*, and a *Blessing to others*, and may serve as *so many powerful Motives*, to encourage the Charity for which we now plead. In one Word, — every returning Year, brings the *Society* the agreeable News, — of their *Missionaries Progress abroad*, and the *happy Effect of their Instructors at Home*: Thro' the Divine Blessing upon their Means, many many Thousands have been taught *the Paths of Life*, who otherwise *might have perished thro' Lack of Knowledge*: — But however far the *Society* have been enabled to extend the Knowledge of Christ, by the good Hand of God accompanying the *charitable*



*table Contributions* of some among ourselves, and the *liberal Donations* sent from *England*: And tho' his Majesty yearly bestows 1000 l. for *itinerant Preachers*, and *Catechists*, yet all this bears but a *small Proportion* to the *Necessities of the Case*.—What *vast Numbers* are still lying in *Ignorance* and *Barbarity* in our own *Higblands* and *Islands*!—not to say, that the far greater Part of Mankind are yet *without Hope*, having never heard of *Jesus*.—Perhaps, what the Society *has done*, or *can do*, till their Funds increase, if compared with what remains to be done,——instead of being a *compleat Remedy*, amounts to little more than a *Discovery of the Disease*.—New Scenes of Distress continually open, and each Day presents an *innumerable Company* of *ignorant Creatures*, whose *hopeless Condition* calls for *speedy Relief*. The *Harvest indeed is great*, but the *Labourers few*. And it ought also to be considered, that the Society are impowered by their *second Patent*, and have *actually begun* to train some of the Children, under their Care, to *Trades* and *Manufactures*, and design to *increase the Number*, as *Donations* are given for that Purpose,——that they may at once fit them for the *Businesses of Life*, and the *Purposes of Eternity*.

On all these Accounts, 'tis hoped, that every one will contribute, *according to their Ability*, to carry on the *good Work*.—

The *Design*, beyond Question, is *excellent* and *glorious*—The *Management* so *frugal* and *exact*, as to have got almost beyond the *Aspersions of Malice itself*.—And we need not repeat, that the Success hitherto has been *remarkable* and *great*.—Thus  
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*every Thing conspires to make the liberal Soul devise liberal Things.*

To inforce the Exhortation, I might speak of the Obligations we are under to *Works of Charity*, from our *very Frame and Make*, from our *present Situation*, and the *Relation* we bear to *another State of Things*.—I might talk of the *Divine Pleasure*, the *Satisfaction* flowing from *Bounty and Beneficence*, and the *future Glories* that await the *charitable Christian*.--- We might mention the *Command* of the *Great God*, the *Example* of our *Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, the *Conduct* of his *Apostles*, and the *Practice* of our *Friends and Acquaintance*; to which we might add, that the *mistaken Zeal* of others, who spare no *Expence* or *Labour* in propagating *Doctrines*, in themselves *hurtful* and *pernicious*, --- should shame us out of our *Indifference* about propagating the *useful*, the *necessary Truths* of the *Gospel*. But passing all these, methinks 'tis sufficient to put the *Disciples of Christ* in *Mind*, that we are pleading for their *Assistance*, to enlarge the *Boundaries* of the *Mediator's Kingdom*, that he may have an *additional Revenue of Glory*, and that the *Crown* may for ever flourish upon his *Head*, --- than which nothing can be dearer to his *ransomed Ones*.

We are beseeching you, in the *Bowels of Mercy*, to contribute for conducting *bewildered Souls* from *Darkness* into the *Light* of the *glorious Gospel*; *SOULS*, which however debased thro' *Sin* and *Ignorance*, yet, if viewed in their *heavenly Original*, or in the *Glass* of what they may one *Day* become, particularly throughout the *after Brightnings* of the *eternal State*, are of such *infinite Value*, as be-  
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speaks your *Compassion*, in *Language* more moving; than the most *perswasive Eloquence*.

Will you grudge parting with *a little* of your *superfluous Substance*, to help those for whom, perhaps, *precious Christ died*? Sure the increasing the *Glare* of your *outward Splendor*, or the *Number* of your *Retinue*, or attaining the *like Trifles*, the *utmost Length* that *Riches* can go, is not to be compared with the *Honour* of adding *ONE* to the *Triumphs* of the Redeemer: When all *earthly Honours* are laid in the *Dust*, this *Glory* shall *never fade*, this *Lustre* *never decay*: Every *Soul* saved by your *Means* will become your *Crown* and your *Joy*, *World* without *End*: For *they that be Teachers*, shall *shine as the Brightness of the Firmament*, and *they that turn many to Righteousness* as the *Stars* for *ever and ever*.

It cannot but excite a *Mixture of Grief and Surprise* to reflect, how often *these* or the *like Arguments* have been used, on *Occasions* of this *Nature*, ——— and that still many, who would take it exceedingly amiss, should you doubt of their *Christianity*, prefer the *Pride of Life*, and the *Lust of the Eye*, to this *God-like Work* of *converting Sinners from the Error of their Way*.

——— They can lend a *deaf Ear* to the *perishing Groans* of their *Fellow-creatures*, as having *nothing to spare*, but never want *Abundance* to support the most *expensive Luxury*: ——— Talk to them of a *needy Brother*, and they answer, *We cannot always be giving*: But erect a *Stage* as often as you will, demand *what you please*, and you shall *seldom fail* to have a *crowded House*, furnish'd  
out



out in all the *Extravagance* of Dress. We speak this, my dear Friends, with *some Concern* for those who so far misimprove the *distinguishing Goodness* of a *bountiful Providence*: But we *hope better Things* of you, Things that will accompany your own *Salvation*, and promote the *Eternal Welfare* of others.

And now let the *Honour* of God and the *Redeemer*, the *Love* of precious and *immortal Souls*, and all the *sweet Endearments* of the Gospel, at length open the *Heart* and *Hands* of the *Rich*, to contribute for the *Encrease* of the Society's Funds: By this Means the *Blessing* of *Thousands* that are ready to *perish*, being without Christ, and so without Hope, shall come upon you; and many that are now but *growing Evils*, will prove *useful* and *necessary Members* of Society, and shall be gradually led on to a *blessful Hereafter*.

To conclude, May the *Sun of Righteousness* arise, upon all Nations, with Healing under his Wings,--scattering the *Mist* of *Barbarity* and *Ignorance*, that hang over the *remote Corners* of our own Country; and the yet more *distant Places* of the *habitable World*, that have not hitherto been enlightned with *Divine Revelation*;--that the *happy Time* may approach, when, according to *ancient Prophecy*. the *Earth* shall be full of the *Knowledge* of the *Lord*, as the *Waters* cover the *Sea*; and the *Kingdoms* of the *World*, become the *Kingdoms* of our *Lord* and his *Christ*.—Then shall our *Adversaries* have it no longer to object, That the Gospel is of a *limited Extent*; when not only we in this Land, but *Men every where* shall be blessed in him, and all Nations

*shall call him Blessed, saying, with chearful Souls and joyful Lips, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who only doth wondrous Things: And blessed be his glorious Name, for he has visited and redeemed us; the whole Earth is filled with his Glory. Amen and Amen.*

**F I N I S.**



